

**Opening Statement of Chairman Dave Reichert  
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science, and Technology  
Committee on Homeland Security**

**Joint Hearing with the Subcommittee on Prevention of Nuclear and  
Biological Attack**

**“Protecting the Homeland: Fighting Flu from the Front Lines”**

**At 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 8, 2006  
2237 Rayburn House Office Building**

Good afternoon. Let me first welcome our panel of distinguished witnesses. We greatly appreciate your appearance before us today for this joint hearing on our Nation's preparedness to deal with a potential avian flu pandemic.

Before we start, I'd like to commend my colleagues, Chairman John Linder and Ranking Member Jim Langevin of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Nuclear and Biological Attack, for their hard work on this complex and pressing issue.

I appreciate their willingness to hold this joint hearing with the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science, and Technology – which I chair with the able assistance of my good friend, Bill Pascrell.

As a former Sheriff, I approach this issue from the perspective of a first responder. Avian flu may never strike the United States, but if it does, this country must be prepared. A pandemic would affect every sector of our society, not just our Nation's healthcare system. It has the potential to severely disrupt our way of life, cause a devastating loss of life, and have staggering effects on the international economy.

And, as usual, we will rely heavily on our Nation's law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, and health service workers to serve on the front lines, putting them at grave risk. These dedicated, caring

men and women will not only be required to care for the sick. They also will be required to ensure the continuation of essential services, maintain public order, distribute drugs, medical supplies, food and water, and enforce quarantines and isolations.

Given the unique nature of a pandemic, the Federal government will not be able to respond to every “hot spot.” Unlike a natural disaster, even one as catastrophic as Hurricane Katrina, a pandemic knows no geographical or temporal bounds. It can spread around the globe over the course of months or even years, usually in waves, and affect communities of all sizes and composition. That is precisely why our Nation needs to ensure that every level of government is adequately prepared.

It is my hope that this hearing will give the Subcommittees a better sense of State and local government and private sector pandemic flu preparedness and how the Federal government can support such efforts.

I want to again thank the witnesses for their testimony today and our colleagues on the Prevention Subcommittee for holding this joint hearing with us.